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Plea to Russian Slaves Barred by Red Masters

THAT was a good speech President Truman made against the Iron Curtain. It is to be hoped a few paragraphs filtered into Russian ears. Chances are, however, that like much of the Voice of America, it splattered unheard, like sleet against a granite cliff, or raindrops in a dry-leafed forest.

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The reason for such pessimism is memory. Personal memory of no radios for sale in Moscow and Leningrad shops. The radios manufactured since then in the U.S.S.R. are the kind that fit MIG-jets. The battery jobs they'd require to hear foreign broadcasts in a land where power lines are few, indeed, were not on the shelves when we shopped in Russia, in '47.

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Furthermore, getting a permit to own a radio in Soviet Utopia is only slightly less difficult than obtaining a license to hunt commissars. One can readily imagine the Socialist State store manager's reaction when Boris, the uranium-mine serf, asks to look over a small table set:

"Yah, and maybe then we can also show you some nice, repeating bazookas? Or a dozen hand grenades? Get outa here!"

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Life goes on in the Soviet Union somewhat sterner, if anything. Comes a report from an escaped laborer in one of the Caucasus slave camps, via the Paris newspaper, Figaro. If such things could be counted in our favor, they might loom bigger than a Truman speech over the Curtain. But they can't.

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The fellow reports that most workers today in Russia do NOT belong to the Communist Party. In fact, they belong to nothing. They are strictly individuals, but not rugged. They just get by on the lean diet and low pay of the average worker. Lenin-Stalin style socialism has by now so shared the wealth, there's only a surplus of misery to go round.

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The refugee's story coincides perfectly with what we saw in the Zis auto factory in Moscow, at the Stalingrad tank arsenal, and in the American gift rubber plant outside Stalin's capital. Pay is so bad, many workers earn extra rubles at outside work. The women all have jobs, with housework later in the day. It costs more than 700 rubles for food alone, but the average monthly wage is often 600, and even in Moscow was, in 1947, about 900 at the top.

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Workers have unions for "social purposes" only. Since they theoretically own the works, they can't strike against themselves. They never had strikes, said the manager of Zis. Not in his 23 years on the job. Pay goes according to the importance (militarily) of the work. Scientific operators get the best, including housing, rations and recreational facilities. Workers purchase their necessities at stores set aside for each class in "classless" Russia. Their ration cards are not honored elsewhere.

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The happy comrades never talk politics; they may ask for more pay, but it's rarely granted. Equality? "We are only workers. We have no say. The bosses have all the rights," says the man who crawled under the Curtain.

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But of political indoctrination there's plenty. Lectures all the time, with every muzhik and his old woman trying to wiggle out of the dull ordeal. Parades and demonstrations are by order. The kept Red press hails them as "spontaneous." Even the Russians tell ironic tales about these things. But if overheard by a stool-pigeon or MVD-man, it's the ice gang in Siberia for the raconteur.

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Russia's many racial differences often flare into fights. Caucasus mountaineers have become so tough of late, that officials don't go around alone, and certainly not after dark. Hope for better days is rarely expressed. The Five-Year Plan promise is a joke. Nobody pays much attention to such talk any more.

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Disciplined, hard-core Party leaders, tactically spotted in the vast Red empire, keep the totalitarian machinery together. Tough squads are sent to size up places like China, and they have spread to most of its large cities. Military "advisers," as demonstrated in the Yugoslav complaint in U.N., quickly take over the best, and lesser officials clam up, and take orders. It's the same along the economic beat.

Now there's comfort for the West in these recitals of discontent, but it would be silly to bank upon it. Creeping dissatisfaction may exist among the more intelligent Russians, and it certainly burns among the satellite slaves. But it is helpless while the secret police, Red army and ruthless Communist Party spies maintain their iron control.

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There can hardly be an insurrection where even Moscow has no telephone book, and private telephones are as hard to come by as radio-television sets. As General Bedell Smith said: "One tank can cow a sizable city. One company of soldiers or police can mow down the best intended revolt. These people know all the moves and most of the hideouts—they survived the Czarist purges, and they know just where to go."

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But where the misery piles up like sediment around a civilization, there is always the possibility of something different, something more overwhelming than an old-time revolution. If the comrades and their victims would all sit down and quit, in the fashion of Gandhi's passive resistance, then the stories coming under the Curtain might be worth putting in your future book.